Carrithers Family's Role in Fairbury History

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The Carrithers family has been a part of Fairbury history since the 1880s, including several war veterans, a judge, a librarian, and a proprietor of a very popular Fairbury coffee shop, the Grey Goose. Truman Carrithers could have been one of our famous generals during World War II if the Spanish Flu had not claimed him.

The story of the Fairbury branch of the Carrithers family began in Ireland. James B. Carrithers (1738-1813) grew up in Ireland and married Mary Porter (1735-1813). Son William Porter Carrithers was born in Ireland in 1761. He was one of five sons of James and Mary Carrithers.

In 1771, James and Mary Carrithers emigrated to America with their family. Son William P. Carrithers was ten years old when they made the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. On the same ship was nine-year-old Mary Jane Calhoun. Her family was also emigrating from Ireland to America.

One of the five sons of James and Mary Carrithers, James Carrithers, enlisted and was killed in the War of 1812. Sons William and Stephen Carrithers settled in Indiana. Charles Carrithers settled in Pennsylvania, and Adam Carrithers lived in Kentucky.

In 1783, William P. Carrithers married Mary Jane Calhoun, the same woman who emigrated to America with him when she was nine years old. They were married in Pennsylvania. He was 22, and she was 21. They had 11 children.

In 1820, William P. Carrithers bought a tract of land known as Curry's Prairie in Sullivan County, Indiana. William and Mary Jane Carrithers moved their family to Indiana. William P. Carrithers died in 1836, and Mary Jane Carrithers passed away in 1845.

One of the 11 children of William P. and Mary Jane Carrithers was Alexander Beard Carrithers, born in 1800 in Kentucky. In 1824, A.B. Carrithers married Sarah McClellan. They had six children. The first wife of A. B. Carrithers died in 1837. Mr. Carrithers was married two more times during his lifetime. He lived in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, and finally returned to Missouri. He died in Butler, Missouri, in 1872.

The eldest son of Alexander and Sarah Carrithers was William Porter Carrithers. He was born in 1829 in Sullivan County, Indiana. William P. Carrithers lived in various states with his father but stayed in Illinois when his father moved back to Missouri.

In 1853, when William P. Carrithers was 24, he married 21-year-old Mary Esther Barnes. She was the eldest daughter of Reverend Henry B. Barnes. They had ten children. W. P. Carrithers became a minister and eventually moved to Saunemin, Illinois.

Three of the ten children of William P. and Mary Carrithers became well known in Fairbury. Daughter Elizabeth Beth Carrithers married Edgar Allen Agard. Mr. Agard was a Fairbury attorney and was the Mayor of Fairbury.

Daughter Nellie Marie Carrithers was a school teacher in Fairbury. She then became the Librarian at the Dominy Library from 1927 to 1947. Nellie never married and died in 1958.

The most well-known of the ten children of William P. and Mary Carrithers was Charles Franklin Henry Carrithers. He was born in 1854 in Illinois. At the age of 25, he married Lucy Brydia. C.F.H. Carrithers graduated from the Iowa Law School in 1882. C.F.H. Carrithers settled in Fairbury, and they had five children. C.F.H Carrithers practiced law in Fairbury and eventually became a Livingston County Judge.

The first child born to Judge Carrithers and Lucy Carrithers was Ralph Carrithers. Unfortunately, Ralph died at the age of nine months.

The second child of Judge Carrithers and Lucy was Truman William Carrithers, born in 1882. Truman excelled in school and graduated from the Fairbury High School class of 1898 at just 15. He was nominated by Congressman Walter Reeves and appointed by President William McKinley to West Point. Truman entered West Point in 1899 and was the youngest member of that class. He graduated in 1903 and received his commission as a second lieutenant seven weeks before he attained the age of 21.

A roommate of Truman Carrithers at West Point was Douglas MacArthur. Mr. MacArthur became one of the most famous generals of World War II in the Pacific Theater. General MacArthur graduated with Truman Carrithers in the class of 1903. After graduating from West Point, Truman married Miss Hope Donley from Peoria. Truman was assigned to various overseas posts and later sent to Washington, DC, to serve during World War I. Truman wanted to be sent to the fighting in Europe, but his commanders thought he was more valuable to the country if he stayed in Washington. Truman was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Unfortunately, Truman contracted the Spanish Flu in 1918 and died ten days later. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

The third child of Judge Carrithers was Mary Louise Carrithers. She was born in 1884 and married John B. DeLancey. They settled and died in Maryland.

Fred Barnes Carrithers, the fourth child of Judge Carrithers, was born in Fairbury in 1887. Like his brother, Truman, Fred Carrithers attended West Point and graduated in 1910. Fred was a veteran of World War I and saw action in France. In 1922, due to a physical disability incurred in the line of duty, Fred retired from the military at the age of 35. Fred married Gertrude Morian of Fredonia, New York, in 1911. Fred and Gertrude had three sons. Major Fred B. Carrithers died in 1973 at the age of 85.

The youngest child of Judge Carrithers was Joseph E. Carrithers. Joe was born in 1890 in Fairbury. Joe was a World War I veteran and saw action in France. Joe married Shirley Bruce in 1917, and they had two children.

Joe Carrithers was best known in Fairbury for owning the Grey Goose coffee shop. He operated the Grey Goose for 27 years. His shop was a favorite stop for many Fairbury residents. In 1959, Joe retired and sold the coffee shop to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Whately. They operated the shop until they sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Royce Carter in 1962. Joe Carrithers died in 1966 at the age of 76.

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Family photo of the C. F. H. Carrithers family in Fairbury circa 1900. From left-to-right, Judge Carrithers, Mary, Fred (seated), Truman, Joe, and wife Lucy Carrithers.